Foreign Owner, First Person Account

MY EXPERIENCE MAKING A GYM SIGN IN VIETNAM

Lessons from opening my fitness studio in Hanoi, told the way it actually happened, mistakes included.

G **Gym Owner · Hanoi, Vietnam**

2 YEARS RUNNING THE GYM	3+ SIGN REDESIGNS
2nd FLOOR LOCATION	5 LESSONS LEARNED

> I opened my gym near a university area in Hanoi about two years ago, and if you ask me which part of setting up the business gave me the most headaches, I would say without hesitation it was the signage. When I first arrived from abroad, I assumed the equipment and the trainers were the only things that mattered, and that the sign outside was just a formality. I was wrong, and I paid for that mistake with a fair amount of time and money. I think what I went through might genuinely help other foreigners who are planning to open a gym here.

01 THINKING THE SIGN JUST NEEDED A NAME

When I first opened, I put up a fairly plain sign with just the gym's name and a small line describing the services. I assumed that people looking for a gym already know what they want, so they would find me regardless of how the sign looked. A few months in, I realized how wrong that assumption was. Hundreds of students and young professionals walked past my building every single day on their way to class or work, and my gym barely registered in their minds. When I asked a few new members how they first noticed the place, several admitted they had walked by many times before finally realizing there was a gym there at all.

The sign gave off no sense of energy or strength, nothing that said fitness or discipline at a glance. That was when it hit me, a gym sign is not just an address marker, it has to communicate the spirit of training the moment someone sees it.

02 THE LETTER SIZE LESSON I LEARNED THE HARD WAY

My gym is on the second floor of a building, with a shop underneath, so the sign had to face the street without sitting at ground level like most storefronts do. My first sign had letters that felt reasonably sized when I stood close to the building, but when I walked across the street to check how it looked from a distance, I could barely make out the name. It was also partly blocked by a tree branch and the shop sign below.

That was when I understood that if your sign is not at street level, you need to think much more carefully about letter height and color contrast than you would for a typical ground floor shop, simply to compensate for the extra distance and the limited viewing angle people have from across the road.

> *A gym sign is not just an address marker, it has to communicate the spirit of training the moment someone sees it.*
>
> WHAT I WISH I UNDERSTOOD ON DAY ONE

03 THE HUMIDITY PROBLEM I NEVER EXPECTED INDOORS

Besides the street facing sign, I also added a few directional signs and area labels inside the gym itself, things like the weights section, the cardio zone, and the yoga room. I used the same outdoor rated material for all of them without thinking it through, but after a while I noticed the signs placed near the heavy lifting area, where sweat and humidity build up constantly, started showing mold along the edges and the laminate began peeling slightly.

I learned that the inside of a gym, even though it is not technically outdoors, creates its own harsh environment because of the heat and moisture from people training continuously, so you cannot just use one type of material everywhere without considering the specific conditions of each spot.

04 MODERN LOOK VERSUS BOLD, MUSCULAR LOOK

There was a period where I genuinely struggled to decide on a design direction, torn between a clean, minimalist look typical of upscale fitness studios, and a bolder, more muscular style with heavier imagery like barbells and dramatic typography, closer to what traditional gyms often use. I tried the minimalist route first, but noticed my core audience, mostly students and beginners, responded much better to something that felt powerful and motivating rather than something too refined that looked more like a high end yoga studio.

I ended up redesigning it with clearer athletic imagery and a stronger color contrast, black paired with red or orange, to better match the energy my members were actually looking for.

05 WHERE I RESEARCHED BEFORE THE FINAL REDESIGN

After enough trial and error, I finally set aside real time to research this properly

before committing to a final redesign. I found the page on gym signage design in Hanoi quite close to my own situation, and it helped me understand how to handle the letter size problem when a sign is not at ground level, as well as how to pick colors that convey an athletic, energetic feel appropriate for the fitness industry.

I also spent some time reading general background on the industry itself, and browsed examples of signage done for other types of businesses, which gave me additional points of comparison before finalizing what I wanted for my own gym. Having a few different reference points made it much easier to communicate clearly with the sign makers, instead of just describing vague ideas the way I did the first time around.

DESIGN REFERENCE

Gym signage design in Hanoi

Real examples of letter sizing and color contrast for upper floor fitness studios.

BACKGROUND READING

Wikipedia: Gym

General history and structure of the fitness industry, useful context beyond trial and error.

MORE EXAMPLES

Quốc Đăng Quảng Cáo homepage

Browse signage examples across other service industries for comparison.

TAKEAWAY

Jump to my five lessons

Skip straight to what I would tell any foreigner opening a gym here.

★ WHAT I LEARNED AFTER ALL THE TRIAL AND ERROR

1. Do not assume that people looking for a gym will find you regardless of your signage. A sign that immediately conveys energy and strength can pull in passersby who were not actively searching for a gym at all.

2. If your gym is not on the ground floor, calculate letter size and color contrast carefully, and physically check visibility from across the street at several angles before finalizing anything.

3. Do not assume one material works everywhere inside the gym. Ask specifically about moisture resistance for signage near heavy training areas.

4 Choose a design direction based on who your actual members are, not a generic trend that looks good in a portfolio but does not match your audience.

5 Get a few different reference points before you brief a sign maker. Vague descriptions lead to redesigns, specific references save time and money.

Looking back on the whole process, I now have a sign I am genuinely happy with, one that fits my gym and my members well, and I think that result was worth all the costly lessons I had to learn on my own along the way.